EDU 221

Spring 2013

Curriculum Instruction Assessment (CIA)

FIAE Combo Reflections – Chapters 11, 12, 13, 14

Together, these four chapters delve deeper into the quagmire of grading policies and practices within our classroom. Grading is sensitive topic for teachers, administrators, students, and parents alike. Wormeli argues that if we are differentiating are instructional practices, then we must also incorporate differentiation into to our assessment and grading policies. In these chapters, Wormeli discusses both the pros and cons associated with different grading methods, such as the “zero versus sixty” debate, the 4.0 and 100 point scale, grade books, weighting grades, late work, and grading in inclusion classes. He also provides some suggestions as to the effective methods for the communication of students’ grades to the parties concerned – parents, and the students themselves.

As a math teacher in the making, I found the discussion surrounding the 4.0 and 100 point scale really interesting. For me, I see merit in both methods but I am not convinced one approach is better than the other. I would prefer to use a combination. For example, if students were taking a traditional exam I would only lean towards the 100 point scale if I felt that I had a fair and equitable division of the points. I think it is important to be careful not to assign too many points to any single question. A student shouldn’t feel as though they have failed because they struggled to solve a problem or two. I would be inclined to use the 4.0 scale (or something similar) to grade product based work. In these cases I would create rubrics for each assignment so students understood the expectations. Moreover, I want to create a classroom environment which discourages grade obsession. I want a grading system that acknowledges more than just whether the standards have been met. Ideally, this would be a system where students could clearly see their areas of strengths and where they need improvement. Something that can provide clear information as to what they need to do to meet the standard. The text provides an example of a report card that does not assign an overall grade. I really like this idea, however; the current educational system seems to require a single grade as a clear marker of student mastery. Any attempt at grading reform is unlikely to be successful until we reach a clearly articulated social agreement as to what a grading system and symbols truly say about student success.

I found myself having strong opinions about many of the grading related topics mentioned in these chapters. It seems to me that an increasing number of students place much of their self-worth in the grades they receive. As such, it is important that we, as teachers, heed the comments made by one of the contributors to the book that is that “grades as motivators breed dependency, reduce risk-taking, creativity and value.” We must shift away from a culture that uses grades to “motivate, punish, or sort students” (Wormeli, p103) and instead we need to cultivate a climate where grades are simply viewed as a tool to document progress, provide feedback, and “to inform our instructional decisions” (Wormeli, 173). I agree with the author that grades should reflect progress over time, and not represent a single snapshot of one moment. Grading in such a way isn’t a black and white process, but if we are to do our student’s work, and the idea of learning, justice, this seems to be both a fair and necessary practice.